

Civil conflict and education

Citation for published version (APA):

Gómez Soler, S. C. (2015). *Civil conflict and education: how does exposure to civil conflict affect human capital accumulation? Evidence from standardized exit exams in Colombia*. [Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University]. Boekenplan. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20151117sg>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2015

DOI:

[10.26481/dis.20151117sg](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20151117sg)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please check the document version of this publication:

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ADDENDUM ON VALORISATION

This section discusses the valorisation opportunities offered by this doctorate thesis. Following the Regulation Governing the Attainment of Doctoral Degrees established by Maastricht University, these opportunities are examined in terms of the social and economic relevance of the dissertation, the potential target groups, and the methodological innovations applied for the analysis.

A civil war has significant economic, social and political implications that potentially interfere with the development process of the countries affected by it. The objective of this doctorate thesis is to get a better understanding of the relationship between civil conflict and educational achievement, and quantify the magnitude in which civil conflict affects educational achievement measured by the results in exit examinations. To the best of my knowledge, only one effort has been made to try to understand the relationship between conflict and achievement in standardized exams. Such effort was made by Rodríguez and Sánchez (2010). However, this doctorate thesis contributes significantly to the literature because it introduces substantial improvements to Rodríguez and Sanchez's (2010) work in terms of methodology and data quality.

The four empirical papers presented in this doctorate thesis (*Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10*) contribute to advance our understanding of the relationship between civil conflict and educational achievement. The social and economic implications of the results obtained in these chapters are of considerable importance for the formulation of policy to improve the wellbeing of the individuals living in countries affected by civil conflict. In particular, the evidence obtained in this thesis can be used to guide the formulation of policies to improve educational outcomes in countries that are affected or have been affected by civil conflict.

The approach adopted in this dissertation, which takes into consideration educational achievement and not academic desertion as a measure of human capital accumulation, is of relevance given the implications of obtaining high marks in national exams in terms of future academic and labour opportunities. The results of standardized exit examinations are used in many countries as a filter to be admitted to higher levels of education, to qualify for scholarships and to be accepted in job applications. Additionally, recent papers, including Chetty et al. (2011), have documented that test scores predict long-run socioeconomic outcomes (e.g., earnings, employment, arrests, etc.).

This study focuses on those students residing in conflict and non-conflict zones who take part in the formal education system. It is relevant to explore the particular case of the students who stay in the conflict zones because these students might be adapting (or not) to the rough conditions that are prevalent in these areas, and perhaps they have a different educational gap than policy makers think. Although at first glance it might seem obvious that the relationship between civil conflict and education is negative, there are reasons to think that this relationship is not as straightforward as it seems. In fact, the existing literature that studies the relationship between educational enrolment and civil conflict has shown mixed results. For instance, Swee (2008) and Bellows and Miguel (2006) find no significant effects of civil war on enrolment, whereas Lai and Thyne (2007) and Akresh and de Walque (2008) find evidence to show that civil war has a negative effect on enrolment rates. The lack of consistency in the existing literature justifies the need for further research given the social and economic relevance of this topic.

It is also particularly relevant to study the case of those students who have been displaced from their hometown. The available literature for developing countries has shown that there are serious consequences of forced migration in terms of consumption, employment, and health conditions (Ruiz and Vargas 2013). Nevertheless, the lack of research studying the effects of displacement, explained in large part by the unavailability of data to conduct proper analysis, has limited our understanding of this phenomenon (Ruiz and Vargas 2013). It is notable that to the best of my knowledge the empirical exercise presented in *Chapter 9* of this dissertation is the first effort to try to understand and quantify the impact of forced displacement on educational achievement.

The main conclusions of this thesis are of interest not only to the academic community but also to policy makers. In particular, it can provide insights to policy makers who are interested on the formulation of educational policy for conflict and post-conflict scenarios. There are a number of policy recommendations that can be derived from this research and could be implemented in order to assure that education plays a protective role in conflict regions. A general conclusion of this doctorate thesis is that policy makers should work in the creation of new and better incentives to retain students who reside in conflict zones in school with a full time dedication, and if possible, provide financial assistance so that qualified students get the opportunity to attend university. The results obtained in the empirical chapters of this dissertation point to the possibility that those students who are facing difficulties associated to the internal armed conflict are developing high levels of resilience that allows them to continue with their studies successfully, but they need a special follow up. As a

consequence, the design of effective policies to guarantee that those students who stay in conflict zones have the adequate incentives and resources to continue with their studies is an essential task that should be prioritized in the agenda of Colombian policy makers. More governmental resources should be spent in order to meet the special needs of those students who have been affected by conflict (i.e. psychological help, school supplies, special remedial tutorials) and to supervise their progress at educational institutions. It should be noted that the literature has shown that these governmental efforts not only help improve the quality of life of those individuals directly affected by the conflict. As Ostby (2013) has highlighted there is evidence that clearly points to a pacifying effect of education, which has positive repercussions for the entire society. Furthermore, Ostby (2013) has also emphasized that democracies, like Colombia, tend to experience a greater stabilizing effect of education than non-democracies do.

Another policy implication that can be inferred from the results of this PhD thesis is linked to the need for safe learning spaces. The public authorities should make the necessary arrangements in order to protect schools. This is particularly important in order to guarantee that schools are safe learning spaces where students can feel protected. Furthermore, these spaces should provide specialized guidance for kids so that they receive adequate support for learning and psychosocial development. Authorities should also monitor school attendance. This is particularly important in order to have an early detection system of those students who are more likely to dropout from school.

Last but not least, special efforts should be made at conflict zones to strengthen the capacity of the education authorities, and to promote organizational development at schools. Policy makers should design policies to develop the different factors that are conducive to effective schools (i.e. shared vision and goals, a learning environment, concentration on teaching and learning, purposeful teaching, high expectations, home-school partnership, and learning organization). It is particularly important to provide sufficient training to teachers and school authorities on how to deal with the special circumstances associated to the conflict. For instance, teachers should be prepared to guide students that need special protection (e.g. displaced students, risk of recruitment).

Regarding the innovativeness of the research methods applied, this dissertation proposes novel methodologies for the analysis of the relationship between conflict and educational outcomes. This thesis addresses several research questions econometrically using a number of techniques, which include: multilevel analysis, cluster robust inference, instrumental variables, difference in differences approach and a pseudo panel approach. The use of a pseudo panel approach is particularly novel in this area of research. In this thesis I construct a pseudo panel of schools in